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INFO RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 0697  
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RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 5865  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 4223  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1783  
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 4235  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 3331  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 8294  
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 5796  
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0512  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 2591  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000081

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/04/2018  
TAGS: PGOV PREL PTER PHUM MOPS CE  
SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: APRC RESISTING GSL PRESSURE

REF: A. A) COLOMBO 57

¶B. B) COLOMBO 62

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr., for reasons 1.4(b,d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On January 17, Ambassador called on All Parties Representative Committee (APRC) Chairman Tissa Vitharana to discuss the current status of the APRC process. Vitharana said the President has encouraged the APRC to focus its report on full implementation of the 13th amendment. Vitharana said the APRC members worry that simply endorsing the President's suggestions, or recommending only changes that can be implemented without amending the Constitution, will look like a failure on their part. Instead, the APRC hopes to release 2 documents on January 23-- the full proposal that the delegates have been working on during their last 60 meetings, and a recommendation on which elements of the APRC proposal can be implemented immediately. The President's proposal falls far short of addressing the grievances of the Tamil people, and it appears that there will be little of the APRC's proposal that can be implemented without amending the constitution. We are encouraged to see the APRC resisting the GSL's pressure to water down the Committee's final product. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On January 17, Ambassador called on Science and Technology Minister and Chairman of the All Parties Representative Committee (APRC) Tissa Vitharana to discuss the current status of the APRC process. Vitharana said the President called together Committee members on January 9 to encourage them to focus the APRC report on full implementation of the 13th amendment. Vitharana said the President is concerned about creating a situation where the JVP might mobilize the Sinhalese against the GSL, at a time when the President wants to keep his solid backing in the south for his military objectives. The GSL does not anticipate peace talks with the LTTE, and does not believe the UNP will cooperate with the government on a political proposal. As a result, the President has decided the only option for the government, at least in the short-term, is to implement what reforms it can without amending the constitution, Vitharana said. During the January 9 meeting,

the President provided a document, based on the 13th Amendment, that he hoped the APRC would adopt. (Note: Vitharana commented that the President put him in an awkward position by asking him to read this proposal, which he had never seen, out loud to the delegates.) In addition, he asked the APRC for a document outlining how some of the APRC's goals could be implemented under the current constitution.

¶3. (C) Vitharana said the President's document contained many welcome ideas. These included recruitment of Tamil police officers and court interpreters, and the creation of an ombudsman to attend to the grievances of minority communities. Vitharana has suggested setting up a standing committee, chaired by a senior Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) minister such as Jeyaraj Fernandopulle, to implement the document.

¶4. (C) Nonetheless, Vitharana said, the APRC delegates worry that simply endorsing the President's suggestions, or suggesting only those changes that can be implemented without changing the constitution, will look like a failure on their part. In an attempt to honor the President's wishes and achieve their original goals, the APRC hopes to release 2 documents on January 23. One will be the final APRC proposal that the delegates have been working on over the last 60 meetings, and one will be a recommendation on which elements of the APRC proposal can be implemented immediately, without amending the constitution. Vitharana noted that, unlike the President, he believes the UNP would endorse serious APRC proposal. Ambassador reported that he had urged Opposition leader Wickremesinghe to support a credible proposal. He had responded that he would support anything supported by

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minority parties, the Co-Chairs, and India (ref b). Vitharana admitted that key sticking points, such as the use of the word unitary, the unit of devolution, and some issues concerning land rights, remain unresolved. He said he hoped to be able to reach consensus on those items before January 23, and acknowledged that the "consensus" document would not include the support of the JVP or JHU who refuse to endorse any political solution.

¶5. (C) Vitharana observed that the proposals presented on January 23 will be a positive step, even if they are not the final answer. He said the President sees this as a starting point, not a final product, and wants to see the process continue. Vitharana said he believes the SLFP and the GSL "are keen to do something for the Tamil people."

¶6. (C) COMMENT: The president's proposal falls far short of addressing the grievances of the Tamil people, and it appears that there will be little of the APRC's proposal that can be implemented without amending the constitution. We are encouraged to see the APRC resisting the GSL's pressure to water down the Committee's final product. Vitharana seems to be carefully balancing his duties to support the President and to preserve the integrity of the APRC process. Post will continue to encourage the UNP to put national interests ahead of party interests by cooperating and engaging constructively on a political solution. Ambassador took the opportunity of a meeting on January 18 with the Foreign Minister to urge that the GSL proceed with the APRC proposals rather than some new draft that did not reflect the long hard work done by the APRC (septel).

BLAKE